

New Persian *Pahlawān*

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In this paper the New Persian word *pahlawān* “hero, strongman, warrior” is analyzed by way of comparison of known etymologies and attestations of this word in Persian and Armenian. New information about the compounds of this word found in the manuscript kept in the Yerevan Matenadaran of the Glossary *Daqā’iq al-Ḥaqā’iq* written by the mediaeval Ottoman Turkish intellectual and *sheykh ol-eslām* Kemal Pashazada in the sixteenth century, leads us to assume an Arabic origin for this word with the Iranian suffix *-wān*.

The lexeme examined in this paper is a well studied topic in Iranian linguistics.¹ Building upon the work of earlier scholars,² the present research is a new attempt at examining the origin and semantic development of the New Persian word *pahlawān* “hero, strongman, champion, brave warrior, member of the warrior class”.³

1- The paper was read at the Eighth International Conference on Iranian Linguistics, Yerevan, 2018.

2- See F. G. Andreas, “Vier Persische Etymologien”, *Festgabe für Theodor Nöldeke zum achtzigsten geburtstag*, Göttingen, 1916, pp. 2 – 4; W. Skalmowski, “Old Persian Parṣava-“, *Studies in Iranian Linguistics and Philology*, Kraków, 2004, p.258; A. Soudavar, *Iranian Complexities, A study in Achaemenid, Avestan, and Sasanian controversies*, Houston, 2018, p. 31-34; Lecoq, P., *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide*, Paris, 1997, p. 146; G. Lazard, “Pahlavi/Pahlavāni dans le Šāhnāme”, *La formation de la langue Persane*, Peeters-France, 1995, pp. 89-105; A., Pāšā Ejlāli, “*Pahlaw, Pahlawān dar Šāhnāme-ye Ferdowsi*”, Tabriz, 1971; M. Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, Heidelberg, 1963, II, 253; cf. Hassandoušt, M., *An Etymological Dictionary of the Persian Language*, Tehran, v. 2, 2014, s.v. *pahlawān*.

3- See Dehkhudā, s.v. *Pahlawān*.

With the aforementioned meanings, the word *pahlawān* is attested only from the Early New Persian period. In Middle Iranian the words *pahlawānag*⁴, *pahlawīg*⁵ had the meanings “Parthians” and “Parthian language”. The attestation of this word with multiple meanings in the New Persian period can be found in the most important Iranian epic work, Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāme*, as examined by G. Lazard in the paper “*Pahlavi/Pahlavāni dans le Shāhnāme*” where he stated that in the Iranian epic poem, *Pahlawī* or *Pahlawānī* is used:

1. As a language name: *Middle Persian*.
2. As an ethnic name: *Iranian*.
3. As a noun: *hero, strongman, brave warrior*.
4. As an adjective, for instance: *jāme-ye pahlavī* or *jāme-ye pahlavānī* – “the *pahlavanian* clothes, namely the clothes which are suitable for a hero”, *tan-e pahlavī* – “the *pahlavanian* body, person, namely a strong man”, or *del-e pahlavānī* “the *pahlavanian* heart, namely a fearless man”, etc.⁶

In the *Shāhnāme* the terms *pahlawī* and *pahlawānī* are used intermittently as descriptions of the language of pre-Islamic Iran and particularly of the language used in the time of the Sasanians. In a way, everything which concerns pre-Islamic dignity may be qualified by these two adjectives, oscillating in sense between “ancient”, “noble”, and “glorious”⁷.

The late medieval *farhangs* (*Šahāh ol-Fors*, 15th cent.; *Maǰma‘ ol-Fors*, 18th cent.; *Gayās ol-luyāt*, 19th cent.; *Farhang-e Rašīdī*, 17th cent.; *Ānandarāj*, 19th cent.; *Borhān-e Qāte‘*, 17th cent.) for the word *pahlaw* additionally suggest the meaning “city [shahr] and as the name of the region: Isfahān, Rey, Hamadān, Nahavand”⁸.

We can thus state that in New Persian the semantic attestations are:

- پهلَو *pahlaw* – “hero, strongman”, “city”, “name of the region: Isfahān, Rey, Hamadān, Nahavand”;
 پهلَوِي *pahlawī* – “Middle Persian, Iranian, noble, hero, brave warrior”;
 پهلَوَان *pahlawān* – “hero, strongman, champion, brave warrior, member of the warrior class, noble”;
 پهلَوَانِي *pahlawānī* – “original, noble, strong; also Iranian”.

New Persian *pahlawān* is borrowed and attested in Middle Armenian from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries in the form of *փահլաւան* *p’ahlawan* with the following meanings: “hero, epic hero, conqueror, strong man”⁹. The word is preserved in literary and colloquial Armenian. In Armenian dialects, the lexeme is borrowed via Turkish in the forms *փահլէվան* *p’ahlevan*, *փահլուան* *p’ahluvan*, *փալլըվան* *p’aylavan*,

4- See D. Durkin Meiseretnšt, *Dictionary of Manichaean Middle Persian and Parthian*, (Dictionary of Manichaean texts, vol. III, ed. by Nicholas Sims-Williams), Brepols, 2004, p. 274.

5- See D. N. Mackenzie, *A Concise Pahlavi Dictionary*, London, 1971, p. 64.

6- See also F. Wolf, *Glossar zu Ferdosis Schahname*, Hildesheim, 1965, pp. 208-209. A. Pāšā Ejlālī discusses and brings the citations of the forms *pahlaw*, *pahlawī*, *pahlawān*, *pahlawānī* in the *Shāhnāme* (op. cit., pp. 6-31) with the same semantic representations.

7- It’s well known that the New Persian term *fahlaviyat* > MP **pahlawīg*, describing poems composed in Modern Iranian dialects different from literary Persian, links to the region *Fahla* > *Pahla* which comes from the term *Pahlavī* “Iranian”.

8- See A. Pāšā Ejlālī, “*Pahlaw, pahlawān dar Šāhnāme-ye Ferdowsi*”, op. cit. pp. 1-4.

9- See R. S. Łazaryan, H. Avetisyan, *Mijin hayereni baġaran*, Yerevan, 2009, p. 779.

իահիլվաճ պահլիվան, that is to say, “athlete, warrior”, “strong, sturdy”¹⁰, and which also has a connotation of “funambulist”.¹¹ New Persian *pahlawān* was borrowed in Ottoman Turkish, *pehlevan* [իհհիլվաճ],¹² in modern Turkish *pehlivan*,¹³ in Arabic *fahlawat* “feat, skillfulness”¹⁴, also in Georgian as *palavand* and the family name *Palavandišvili*; the epenthetic *-d* after *n-* is characteristic of Georgian¹⁵.

In general, scholars describe the meaning “Parthian”, in its ethnic sense, as an explanation of the above mentioned Iranian terms, evidently derived from the adjective *parθava*.¹⁶ Thus, e. g. both the Middle Iranian term **pahlawānīg* referring to the north-western Middle Iranian dialect known today as “Parthian”, and the early NP continuation of the same word *Pahlawī* used in post-Sasanian Iran as the name of a different, south-western dialect known today as “Book-Pahlavi”, and *Pahlawī* as a “Iranian, noble, glorious” are invariably explained as essentially meanings derived from O.P. *parθava* “Parthian”¹⁷.

In general, the main etymology for *pahlawān* “hero, strong man, noble man” is connected to the ethnonym “Parthian” < OP *Parθava*- with the sound change OP *-rθ-* to MP *-hl-*¹⁸ and the suffix *-ān* indicates the semantic development from the supposed ethnic character and physical nobility of the Parthians to the more generic meaning. According to F. G. Andreas, *pahlawān* goes back to an Old Persian *pāthropāno*, from *pāthro-* (protection), with the addition of the suffix *pāno* (protecting), thus meaning “protector, guard”. In Middle Persian it would have evolved first into **pāthropān*, later **pahrabān*, and finally in New Persian, through the common assimilation of (r) to (l), and (b) to (w), into *pahlawān*¹⁹. M. Mayrhofer has suggested the protoform **Pāθra-pāna* “guard, warder” derived from the OP **parθava-pāna*.²⁰ And according to Skalmovsky’s etymology, *parθava* originates from the adjective **pārθa-ua* “exterior”. As for the spatial meaning of the OP term *Pārθava*, namely “exterior (region), remote (province)” Skalmovsky considers that it is visible in the NP *Pahlewān* “hero, champion”, also derived from OP **pārθava-pāna* via an intermediary form with haplogy **pārθa(va)-βān*, lit: “guardian of the flank” or “companion in arms”; the sense “keeper

10- See Hayoc *lezvii barbařayin bařaran*, Yerevan, 2001, vol. 6, p. 340.

11- See St. Malkhaseanc, *Hayerēn bac’atrankan bařaran*, Yerevan 1944, Vol. 4, p. 481. Cf. also in Armenian *պահլաւ պահլաւ* *pahlaw* (from the medieval period *պահլաւեան* *pahlawean*, *պահլաւիկ* *pahlawik*) with an initial unvoiced *պ-* [p-], means “Parthian, originally Parthian”, while *պահլաւաւաճ պահլաւական* means “typical for the Sasanian and Parthian periods”, and *պահլաւերէն* *pahlaweren* describes “the Persian language of the Sasanian periods”; these are early Middle Persian borrowings and remain in usage today.

12- See Z. Karapetyan, *Ottoman Turkish – Armenian dictionary*, Polis, 1912, p. 201.

13- See Güncel Türkçe Sözlük, Türkiye Türkçesi Ağları Sözlüğü.

14- See X. K. Baranov, *Arabsko-Russkii slovar’*, Moscow, 1957, p. 783.

15- See V. Chkeidze, Georgia V: Linguistic contacts with Iranian languages. In: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 10, p. 487.

16- Cf. In Armenian *պարթև part’ew*, an ethnonym “Parthian”, *պարթևերէն part’eweren*, “the Parthian language” (attested in Armenian sources from the fifth century); *պարթև part’ew* as an adjective “strong, powerful, portly” (probably after the seventeenth century), which is connected with the ethnic character and physique of “Parthians”.

17- For current attempts at explanations and etymologies of the term *Parthian*, see W. Brandenstein & M. Mayrhofer, *Handbuch des Altperischen*, Wiesbaden, 1964, p. 138, s.v. *Parθava-*; R. G. Kent, *Old Persian*, New Haven, 1953, p. 196, s.v. *Parθava-*; W. Skalmowski, “Old Persian *Parθava-*”, opt. cit., p. 255, cf; R. Ghirshman, *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Penguin Books, p. 244; A. Soudavar, *Iranian Complexities, A Study in Achaemenid, Avestan, and Sasanian controversies*, opt.cit., pp. 31-33.

18- See A. Pisowicz, “Origins of the New and Middle Persian Phonological Systems”, Nakł. Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1985, p. 173.

19- See F. G. Andreas, “Vier Persische Etymologien”, opt.cit.

20- See M. Mayrhofer, *Kurzgefaßtes etymologisches Wörterbuch des Altindischen*, opt.cit., p. 253; cf. Hassandoust, M., *An Etymological Dictionary of the Persian Language*, Tehran, v. 2, 2014, s.v. *pahlawān*.

of the flank” that was used for all inhabitants of the border region can best explain the use of the Middle Persian term *pahlawānīg* to mean the “Parthian language, as a language of the keepers”.²¹

Taking into account these known etymologies, I would like to reflect on the explanation of the word *pahlawān* in a manuscript from the sixteenth century, which allows me to suggest a new version for the origin of this word. This is the Glossary *Daqā'iḡ al-Haqā'iḡ* written by the mediaeval Ottoman Turkish intellectual and Kemal Pashazada. The glossary is a bilingual Persian-Ottoman Turkish philological work, which examines more than 400 Persian synonym, homonym and antonym lemmas from Persian literary vocabulary and is based on *beyts* (double verse) and *qıṭa*'s cited from the Persian classical authors Neẓāmī, Ferdowsī, Ḥāfeẓ, Sa'dī, and others. In the word articles of the glossary, the related compounds and word-forming suffixes and prefixes are examined also.²²

In the text of the Glossary the word *pahlawān* is discussed in the following acceptations: *pahlawān* “hero, army leader”; *Pahlawān* – a toponym; *pahlawānī* “strong, brave”. The author explains the word *pahlawān* (Matenadaran, Ms.196, ff. 138b-139b)²³ in the following way:²⁴

“The first *pahlawān* - is a singular name and the leader of the army they called *pahlawān*:

تو گر پهلوانی ز قلب سپاه
چرا آمدستی بدین رزمگاه

to gar pahlawānī ze qalb-e sepāh
čerā āmadastī bedīn razmgāh.

“If you are a hero from the heart of the army
Why did you come to this battlefield?” (*Shāhnāme*).

مرا داد شاه این درفش سیاه
همان پهلوانی و تخت و کلاه

marā dād šāh īn derafš-e siyāh
hamān pahlawānī-yo taxt-o kolāh.

“The king gave me this black flag,
That command (authority) and throne and hat (crown)” (*Shāhnāme*).

Kemal Pashazada continues: “The meaning of *Pahl* is “army” [the author has written in Ottoman Turkish *haşam*] with the suffix *-wān*, which is similar with the suffix *-bān* “keeper, protector”. The sound change *b- > w-* is common for all Persian. Arabic *xayl o haşam* corresponds to Persian *pahl o sepāh*”.

21- See W. Skalmowski, “Old Persian Parṣava-“, pp. 255-256.

22- H. Kirakosyan & A. Sargsyan, “The educational role of the Late Medieval Persian-Ottoman Turkish bilingual dictionaries. The codices of the Matenadaran”, *Turkic Languages*, 22/2, Wiesbaden, 2018, pp.167-175

23- K. Koštikyan, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Matenadaran*, Yerevan: Nairi, 2017, pp. 87-88.

24- I am thankful to Research Assistant Any Sargsyan (Asien-Afrika – Institut, University of Hamburg) for assistance in reading the Ottoman Turkish text.

Pashazada cited the *pahl* as meaning “army” and gives an attestation from the *Shāhnāme*, thus:

یکی هفته بودند با سوک و درد
سر هفته پهل و سپاه گرد کرد.

*yekī hafte budand bā suk o dard,
sar-e hafte pahl o sepāh gerd kard.*

“One week they spent in mourning and pain,
At the end of the week they gathered the army” (Matenadaran, Ms.196, f.139b)²⁵.

In this citation is not definitely the case that *pahl* means army as Pashazada wrote, since we may also interpret the word as پهلو *pahlaw*, thus:

*Sar-e hafte pahlaw sepāh gerd kard.*²⁶
“At the end of the week the warrior gathered an army.”

Kemal Pashazade’s attestation of the word *pahl* “army” and the comparison with the word *xayl* “army, tribe” leads us to compare the semantic development of Arabic loanword *xayl* “horse” in Persian from “horse group → cavalier → tribe”²⁷ (cf. Persian *xeyl* “group, army, and detachment”, *xeyl-xeyl* “group by group”, *xeylbāš* “commander of cavalry”; also in Pashto, *xēl* “tribe, big family”, *padarxēl* “the wife’s father family”, *xēlxāna* “family, clan”, *xēl o xatek* “tribe” etc. In Arabic, from which the Persian word *xeyl* is considered to be borrowed, it has only the meaning of “horse” (pl. *xuyūl*, *axyāl* “horses”).²⁸ The Arabic word *faḥal* “male animal, also stallion”²⁹ possibly underwent a similar semantic development, Persianised as *pahl*, which with the meaning “stallion” is attested in Sāmi’s *Qāmus-i Turkī*³⁰ dictionary, as well as in Armenian,³¹ probably via Persian. It means that we can restore the meaning “male horse” in Persian and the semantic development “horse’s group – cavalier - army”, as in Persian *faḥl* “fighter, male, famous”.³² The

25- *Shāhnāme*, v. 1, Moscow, (ed. A. Bertels), 1999, p. 155: 56. Cf. Asadī Ṭūsī “Garshaspnāma”: *yekī hafte benšast bā sūk o dard, Sar-e hafte laškar hame gerd kard* (<https://ganjoor.net/asadi/garshaspname/sh38/05.10.2019>), where instead *pahl o sepah* is used the synonym *lashkar* “army”.

26- See Dehkhudā, s.v. *pahlaw* “strong”.

27- See W. Crooke, *The tribes and castes of The North-Western Provinces*, vol. 4, Calcutta, 1886, p. 158, G. Morgenstierne, “An Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto”, 1927, p. 96, “A New Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto” ed. J. Elfenbein, D. N. Mackenzie, Nicholas Sims-Williams, [Beiträge zur Iranistik, 23], Reichert: Wiesbaden, 2003, p. 95: The Iranian etymology of the word from < av. *xvaētu-* (about this term see Benveniste, E., “Les classes sociales dans la tradition aveštique”, *Journal Avestique*, vol. XXII, pp. 117-34) see Fr. Andreas, apud G. Morgenstierne, «Etymological Vocabulary of Pashto», 1927, p. 96, W. Eilers, *Der Name Demawend*, *Archiv Orientalni* XXII, 1954, p. 346: G. Doerfer, (see “Turkosche Elemente im Neupersischen”, Band III, Wiesbaden, 1967, p. 191-192) suggests the Arabic origin of the word which came to Persian via Turkish.

28- See X. K. Baranov, *Arabsko-Russkii slowar'*, opt. cit., p. 307.

29- See X. K. Baranov, *Arabsko-Russkii slowar'*, opt. cit., p. 749.

30- See Isatmbul, 1317/1938, p. 983.

31- See St. Malkhaseanc, *Hayerēn bac'atrakan ba'aran*, Opt.cit., v. 4, p. 481; Hr. Acharyan, *Hayereni armatakan ba'aran*, v. 4, Yerevan, 1979, p. 472.

32- See Dehkhudā, s.v. *fahl*

sound changes *f* > *p*-, *-h*- > *-h*- are the results of the contamination with the word *pahlaw* “Iranian, noble, glorious” which is widely attested for the early New Persian period.

Therefore, we can assume that the New Persian word *pahlawān* “hero, strongman, brave warrior” is a compound term composed of *pahl* “army” < ar. *faḥal* “stallion” with the suffix *-wān/-bān* “keeper” and has the meaning “leader of army → hero → strongman”. The attested homonyms *Pahlawī* “Middle Persian, Parthian, Iranian, noble, origin” and *pahlawān/pahlaw* “hero, conqueror, warrior” (adj. *pahlawi*, *pahlawāni* “athletic, epic, heroic”) are originally separate words.

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